SAMUEL CHAPMAN ARMSTRONG

A "STATESMAN-EDUCATOR"

By

STEPHEN S. WISE, Ph. D.

Rabbi of the Free Synagogue

New York City

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An address delivered in Memorial Church, Hampton Institute, by Stephen S. Wise, Rabbi of the Free Synagogue of New York City, on Sunday, February 1, 1914, in celebration of Founder's Day

THOUGH deeply appreciative of the generous words of Dr. Scheiffelin,[1] I yet feel that the invitation to deliver the Founder's Day address was extended to me by your Principal, Dr. Frissell, because he felt that there might be a certain fitness in asking a representative of one of the oldest of the civilized peoples of earth to bring the message of the hour to you, who are the sons and daughters of one of the youngest of earth's races. Much that I shall say to you in this hour will be an offering from out the rich and full storehouse of my people's experiences, gathered in the course of a history of forty centuries of moral and spiritual culture. And this message I am to bring to you, who are of the latest of the races of the world to step out of the darkness of the past and to enter upon the better, brighter, joyfuller way that lies before you.

I have been thinking of the man we are met to commemorate, not only during the past few days, but ever since that hour, nearly fourteen years past, in which I first was privileged to enter within the walls of this Institute. No man in modern times, or even in earlier days, could be more fitly likened to Moses, the great leader of my people, than Samuel Chapman Armstrong. Moses was first the liberator, the emancipator, of his people, resting his eternal faith upon the word of God—"Let my people go that they may serve Me." Having freed Israel from the bonds and fetters of Egypt, Moses rendered the Children of Israel the second and the greater service of leading them to the foot of Sinai, from the summit of which God's moral law was proclaimed unto Israel and through Israel for all time to the peoples of earth. Moses was not content merely to be the emancipator of bondmen. Having freed Israel physically and politically, he then became the moral leader, the compelling legislator. He freed Israel from itself, from its baser, unworthier self, and, at Sinai, he set Israel upon that broad highway of freedom that the soul of Israel was to pursue through centuries then unborn.

[1] Dr. Wise was introduced by Dr. Schieffelin.

In the same way, General Armstrong fought, with lion-hearted courage, throughout the Civil War in order to emancipate your race. But he, as little as Moses, was content to bring a race out of bondage. He knew that even after the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation your souls awaited and demanded another deliverance; he knew that you were still in bondage to yourselves. He divined the truth of the words of the German poet, "Nur das Gesetz kann uns die Freiheit geben"—"The moral law alone can make man free." He, who was destined to become the most wise of friends and the most helpful of teachers, somehow foreknew that, while you must be freed from bondage to your long-time owners, the supreme thing was to free and to save the Negro from himself. For you he wished for both kinds of freedom—freedom from without and, above all, what Thomas Hughes called "freedom to do as you ought." What other man fought for both throughout his life as did Armstrong, through the bitter days of war and the wearying years of peace? Even, I repeat, as Israel was freed, not in Egypt but at Sinai, so General Armstrong was among the first to understand that, though your race was forever freed from without on the first day of January, 1863, the emancipation would not really be until crowned by the acceptance of the higher law of moral and spiritual freedom.

I name General Armstrong today statesman-educator of democracy. He was far-sighted and fore-sighted enough to understand the importance of obeying the command of the New England poet of the humanities, who bade men substitute

> "For slavery's lash the freedman's will,
> For blind routine, wise-handed skill."

No words of mine could encompass the measure of the service of Armstrong as did Whittier in these prophetic lines, which might well have been chosen for the motto of Hampton. It was as though Armstrong had remembered, too, the earlier words of the Elizabethan dramatist:

> "O what a world of profit and delight,
> Of power, of honor, of omnipotence,
> Is promised to the studious artisan."

It was left to the genius of this statesman-educator of the highest order to translate the dreams of poets separated by centuries into an abiding reality for the good of a newly awakened race.

I name Armstrong not only statesman-educator but statesman-philanthropist as well, for Armstrong was that if ever man was. He loved not only his own neighbor but all men as his neighbors. He loved not only his own race but he loved and served the races of the earth. He could not love the stranger as

himself, for stranger was an alien term in the vocabulary of his soul. Statesman-patriot of the brotherhood of democracy he may well be called, who was among the first to understand the possibilities of the slogan inscribed upon the Robert Gould Shaw Memorial in the city of Boston—"The white officers—the black men—together"—that in the togetherness of service lay the solution of the problem which involved the destinies of two races, that the white and the Negro races must together work out their common salvation.

Again I name General Armstrong a statesman-philanthropist of democracy, who, to cite the words of his official report of 1866, clearly saw that the "education of the freed men is the great work of the day. It is their only hope, the only power that can lift them up as a people." He seemed to understand, perhaps better than any man of his day understood, that which a noble pagan had declared centuries and centuries before—"No man can permanently be kept erect by others." All that men can do for man is to help him to rise to the largest possibilities of his moral and spiritual stature. This was the self-chosen task of the statesman-philanthropist-educator of democracy who conferred upon you, and upon a whole generation that went before you, the highest of all boons, all that a man can do for men—the boon of helping you to stand erect.

I would, however, not dwell upon Armstrong's achievements, but rather, as far as I may, seek to learn the secret of his life, or, better yet, the motive-power that lay back of that life, simply great and greatly simple, that life of finest, rarest human worth. Armstrong was a visionary, an idealist. Unconsciously, even in the earliest days of army service, he seemed ever to vision the future, though he concerned himself solely and alone with tasks of the immediate present. "And so I do not bother myself much about possibilities, but strive rather to obey the calls of the present and trust in God." In speaking to young men, I have sometimes ventured to say that the only truly practical man in the world is the visionary, for he alone is the man who foresees and foreknows today that which will come to pass on the morrow. The man who was placed in charge of the construction of the earlier buildings at Hampton says: "I sat on a log and looked at him. I thought he was a visionary. It all came to pass." Sometimes the idealist is imagined to be an impatient man. Even Lord John Morley expressed something of impatience with the so-called impatient idealist. But, in truth, the idealist is the most patient being on earth, for he takes the long look, the far look ahead, and patiently and laboriously strives for that which may be centuries in the future. Such a finely patient, withal never-wearied, idealist was

Armstrong who, in the words of his daughter, said, when a promising pupil went to the bad, "If we were not working for two hundred years hence, this might be discouraging."

As I have read and re-read the story of Armstrong's life, it has seemed to me that one of the most significant things in that life, and perhaps the most potent formative influence throughout his days, was the home influence which happily fell to his lot. That home, on the borders between the far West and the farther East, tells at every point in his great career. The life to which he was born was the life of missionaries, of God-fearing, God-dedicated souls, giving themselves to the high task of humanizing and moralizing and religionizing the souls of a people that dwelt in darkness. What a background of high enterprise and noble endeavor the memories of that home furnished throughout his days!

Dr. Frissell finely said in his last annual report that the founder of Hampton Institute, when confronted with the problems of men and women but lately freed from slavery, a race without the tradition of self-respecting family life, unconsciously adopted the home as the model for his school and chose that type of home where each member contributes his share of service to the common need. I trust that my words may command the assent of Dr. Frissell, who knew his predecessor so well and follows so truly in his footsteps, when I say that I believe that Armstrong not only wished to make of Hampton a home, but that he must surely have forefelt that he could render you no finer service nor better lead you in the direction of self-reverence than by making you understand and love the values of home life. Surely it must have come to his wise and far-seeing soul that no race could become truly self-respecting until it had built itself up, as it were, upon the basis of the family unit, and the home foundation. Into Hampton, General Armstrong carried the home spirit, the home influence, the home atmosphere. He could make no finer contribution to Hampton Institute as a home than to show forth, as he did from day to day, what the inspirations and the values of the home had become in his own life. He never rendered you, nor those men and women who have gone before you, greater service than when he made you love Hampton as a home and then go out from Hampton and magnify your own homes. No finer service can be rendered to any man or woman at Hampton than to send him or her forth a lover and cherisher of home values. The surest test of a people's culture lies in the value which it attaches to the home. Until you become a people of homes, a home-loving and home-prizing people, you are still at one of the earliest stages of human progress and culture. The higher a race rises, the more deeply it values and cherishes the home.

One of the perils in the life of our own time lies in the breaking down of home standards and the lowering of home values. If the family and its self-sufficing integrity are to go, then this American democracy of ours will not be worth while. May not I, as a teacher of moral and spiritual values, warn you, young men and women of the race that is yet in the making or re-making, against the peril of thinking lightly of the home? If you would build wisely and lastingly, you must build upon the foundation of the home, magnifying the home, glorifying the family life. It is something to gain houses and land and implements and so-called position and even power, but I say to you, young men and women, that all these things are as nothing beside the home which alone can give these things a soul. Cherish the home ties and the home joys, magnify the home duties and the home simplicities, revere the home sanctities and the home tendernesses, so that these shall mean more to you than aught else in the world; and these in turn will serve to enrich and to ennoble your own lives.

I speak with deep feeling here, because I am come from a people which has ever magnified the home. The world shut out Israel and so Israel had to shut itself up as it were within the home. Israel enriched the home and the home in turn exalted Israel. Israel magnified home values and held home ties priceless. Although the world without battered against the walls of Jewish life and integrity, Jewish self-respect was maintained and a fine Jewish dignity was perpetuated from generation to generation, because the light was never suffered to die out of the Jewish home. The Jew fought at one and the same time for the altar and the hearth. He brought his altar to his hearth and he made of his hearth a veritable altar before God, with father and mother as its ministering priest and priestess, a veritable shrine, such as you must dream of making your home, sun and shield of your own race. If ever Israel's home passes, Israel will and ought to perish, for all that is finest and noblest will have passed out of the life of Israel.

The moral genius of the man we this day remember is nowhere more clearly shown than in his lifelong conquering of difficulties and, what was even finer, his life-long seeking out of life's hardest places. "There is a certain spirit of conquest in this work that I like. We have lots of strong places to take and we have the force to do it. . . Not very easy, but it can be done." Above all things, General Armstrong was a pioneer, choosing life's outposts in his own day as his father had chosen them before him. "I am glad I am on the outposts doing frontier and pioneer work, for the South is just now a heathen land and Hampton is on the borders thereof. I see my whole nature calls me to

the work that is done there—to lay foundations strong, and not do frescoes and fancy-work." Throughout his days, he welcomed and even sought out difficulties in order that he might triumphantly overcome them.

What finer service could any man render the nation than to show, as Armstrong did, that America means the doing of what cannot be done, the doing of the impossible in the strength of God, translating the impossible to the possible, the unattainable into the achieved. "Doing what cannot be done is the glory of living." This principle was the chiefest compulsion of his life, and made him a resistless conqueror. "I feel happy when all my powers of resistance are taxed; I must win. God has not darkened the way. His hand points to a steep and craggy height. It must be climbed; I will climb it." Thus he served three races in America by constantly teaching and living by the maxim that life's so-called impossibilities are not to be accepted as insuperable obstacles and hindrances but to be hailed as spurs and stimuli to the soul. If I were to indulge in a moment of self-revelation, I should lay bare as one of the secrets of my own life that nothing has helped me more than the mandate of General Armstrong, which his lips proclaimed and his life illustrated—the impossible vanishes as the morning mist before the soul of a man who trusts in God and dares all things with the might of his own soul.

If it fell to me to analyze the life and spirit of General Armstrong in a very few words, I should venture to say that the secret of his days is to be found in the truth that he never concerned himself about the best that the Republic could offer him but ever about the best which he could offer to the Republic. He never thought of sacrifice upon the altar of the Republic as grim and austere, for, as he sacrificed, sacrifice was rich and gladsome, pouring itself forth as the inevitable expression of his soul. The man who makes the highest and the finest sacrifices in life is usually so enamoured of his task that he knows not that he is making sacrifices. The beauty and the bloom of sacrifice were vanished if a man were ever thinking of sacrifice. If General Armstrong rose to the supreme height of unwearied and unending, withal unconscious, sacrifice throughout his days, it was because he sounded the keynote of his life when, in 1864, at the age of twenty-five, he wrote to his mother: "It is no sacrifice for me to be here. It is rather a glorious opportunity and I would be nowhere else than here if I could and nothing else than an officer of colored troops if I could. This content, this almost supreme satisfaction, sheds a rich glow upon my life." Not of sacrifice he thought but of glorious opportunity, though that glorious opportunity lay on the field of carnage and death. All his

life he was thinking, not of what he was giving up, but of the content and the supreme satisfaction which, as he put it, shed a rich glow upon his life. I am merely giving you his own thought, for you will remember the words found among his memoranda: "What is commonly called sacrifice is the best use of one's self and one's resources, the best investment of time, strength, and means. He who makes no such sacrifice is most to be pitied."

General Armstrong was never conscious of self-sacrifice, because he never thought of himself at all. If he thought of self at all it was ever last. A biography of five or ten thousand pages would not tell as much about the man as a word which he wrote on New Year's Eve in 1890: "It pays to follow one's best light, to put God and country first, and ourselves afterward." Contrast him for a moment with the men who live for themselves, who live for their stomachs and their appetites and their passions, who live in order to gain money and nothing else, who live in order to achieve fame and nothing more. Samuel Chapman Armstrong never thought of himself, and because he never thought of himself the world will never cease to think of him. The man who ever thinks of himself the world soon forgets. The man who never thinks of himself the world will never suffer to pass out of its remembrance. The man who thinks most about himself is the man who is soonest forgotten, if remembered at all. Daringly, selflessly, gloriously, Armstrong spent himself, first in war and then in peace, while the prudent and conventional thought him rashly daring and wondered why he did not dedicate his gifts to some gainful callings—to callings which would help him occupy a great seat among the places of men. Today, this man who spent himself in peace and in war in utter self-forgetfulness lives and will live in the hearts of your race and in the memory of the white race—a precious and kindly heritage to us all.

If the spirit of Armstrong could be summoned to this scene in this hour, would he not say: Do not think of me but remember only the men and the women whom I sought to serve. So be it! Shall I not then express the conviction of all of us when I say that there never lived a man of finer self-respect and deeper self-reverence than was Armstrong. And yet that self-respect was not rooted in insistence upon self. He never insisted upon himself; upon you he ever insisted. His was that highest imaginable self-reverence, which takes little or no thought of self and which is reached through pursuing the pathway of self-surrender, self-forgetfulness.

There are times when men must insist upon themselves, when men's insistence upon themselves must be manful, earnest, uncompromising, when nothing worse could happen to a race

than to assent, in the words of Kelly Miller, to "self-obliteration." But before any race can insist upon the reverence of the world, it must find its way to self-reverence through self-surrender, through that forgetfulness of self which is wrought out of the exalting ideal of service and dedication.

I should be the last man in the world to urge upon you, men and women of the Negro race, that you waive your rights or submit to wrongs. If I were speaking to white men, I would insist solely upon the rights of the Negro. Speaking as I am, however, to young men and women of the Negro race in this hour and under the inspiration of this truly august day which gave Armstrong to American history, I say to you that the surest way to secure rights is to meet duties gladly, greatly, conqueringly. I do not maintain that no wrongs will be done you, nor would I ask that you should even for a moment refrain from protest against wrong. But do not forget that while there are times when insistence upon rights by men is absolutely inevitable if they would continue to have the regard of their fellow-men, the doing of the right will, in God's providence, prove for you the surest way of safe-guarding your rights as men and as Americans. There are times when you must insist upon your rights, but it is ever your business to insist upon duty, and *duty*, and DUTY yet again.

If I failed to urge you to protest against wrong when wrong is done you, I should not have the right to ask you to accept me as your friend. For well do I know that there are times when protest against wrong must be sounded, and this knowledge is born out of the experience of a people who have been deeply wronged through the ages. Within a few weeks, my people, which gave to the world the idea of a God regnant in righteousness, my people, which gave to the world the Bible old and new, my people, from whose loins sprang generations of patriarchs, and judges and kings and prophets—*my people*—have had to face the tribunal of the world's judgment on the charge of ritual-murder. I say my people, for if that Russian Jew was guilty of ritual-murder, then is every Jew guilty of ritual-murder, living or dead, then were the founders of Christianity sharers of the guilt of Russia's hapless victim. Can you imagine what it means to my people, nineteen hundred years after the birth of Him you name Master, him we call the latest in the great order of Hebrew prophets, that we in this twentieth century should be arraigned before a Russian court of justice on the charge of ritual-murder? And yet, in the despite of this unutterable calumny against a proud and honorable people, do you think that we are to give our days to protest against this hideous charge? "Assailed by slander and the tongue of strife, the only answer is a blameless life."

Lest I be misunderstood, I repeat that there may be times in your life when wrong will be done, when you will be so assailed that it will be the part of your manhood and your womanhood to protest. But by my people's experience of centuries and centuries of injury and wrong, I adjure you, men and women, never to forget that the only answer to assailing slander is a blameless life, that in truth there is something infinitely finer and greater than defending one's self against charges of wrongdoing, and that is to offend not in the sight of God or man. To some of you my counsel will commend itself little if at all, but I say to you again that which I have said to my people again and again and shall continue to say whilst I live—the surest way of meriting, even though one gain it not, the reverence of the world without, is through that self-reverence which rests forever on the doing of the right. The world may choose to withhold its reverence, but it cannot lessen the worth of my life if worthy I be. The world may impinge upon that outer fate of which I am not wholly master; but it cannot mar my inmost soul, of which I am forever captain.

In stressing duties rather than rights, for rights come from without and obedience to duty comes out of the inmost soul, I am but echoing a word of another friend of the Negro race, General Howard, who, speaking many years ago, of certain conditions that bore very hard upon you, said that on the whole it was better for you, for it put you at the bottom of the ladder. What you have the right to demand is that the ladder stand and remain open and accessible to you all. You may not demand that you have the first nor the second place, but that, no matter where you begin, the top shall not be barred nor shut nor denied to you. A fair field and no favor, withal no disfavor, is all that a man may ask—and with God be the rest!

I revert for the last time to the possibility of times coming in your life when wrong will be done, when iniquity shall darken the ways of men in their dealings with you. What, I ask for the last time, shall be your attitude toward occasional injustice, toward the wrong when wrong is inflicted upon you? Two attitudes there are, alike wrongful—the one is the attitude of uncomplaining and cowardly acquiescence, and the other is the no less intolerable attitude of ceaseless whining. Men never whine; men complain, protest, rise up. Men speak out and speak up and speak on, but they do not whine, for they are men. It is your business to be men, first, last, ever—firm in protest against wrong, protesting as men, nor leaving it wholly to others to protest for you—but never whining.

One other word of counsel I venture to offer you, phrasing it in the word of one of the noblest friends of your race, Wendell

Phillips, who, in 1868, said "Let us give to the Negro a chance to show that Toussaint L'Ouverture was not a splendid monster, but a fair representative of the capacity of his race." Upon a deep truth I would here lay emphasis. Far better that you produce not a few exceptional and extraordinary persons, though that, too, were fine, but a multitude of fair representatives of the capacity of your race. Your constant aim must be to produce the highest possible average and not a few extraordinary and unaccountable beings. The world is going to judge you by what you are in the aggregate and not because of what a few of your outstanding and exceptional men may be or do. When the world without assails you, the blameless or even the matchless life of a single representative, or a handful of representatives, of your race will not and ought not to avail. The Negro race is not going to be saved by its Washingtons and its Dunbars, its DuBoises and its Tanners and its Millers, but it will be saved, as it must be served, by the men and the women within my hearing. Neither will office-holding by a chosen few save your race. Some of you vainly imagine that a millennium will be at hand for your race, if only a few of the representatives of the Negro race achieve political position. It is far more important for you that the average Negro, in the despite of every obstacle cruelly placed in his pathway, shall earnestly strive to be a good citizen. Barter not away the soul of your race for a few political jobs.

Above all, I would say to the members of the Negro race here assembled that which you never have the right to ignore—no one man at his best can save you, but one man at his worst can terribly disserve and almost damn your whole race. "He who commits a crime helps the enemy." He who among you commits a wrong does that which wrongs your whole race. Every Negro bears upon his own shoulders for weal or woe the burden of his people. If you are men and women you will accept this burden as a challenge, as a glorious opportunity to be met in the spirit of finest manhood and noblest womanhood. No man liveth unto himself alone—is peculiarly true of the Negro if he fail or fall. Who among you will ever be ready to do wrong, knowing as you must know that it is not alone the doer of the wrong who will suffer but the whole of your race ?

I have wondered as I have stood before you whether you feel that the recital of the life of Armstrong cannot help you, for he was a man who dwelt apart. Apart he seems, it is true, for, as Renan says, the man whom God has touched is always a being apart. In that sense, Armstrong was a being apart. And yet those of you who, like Dr. Frissell, knew Armstrong well, will, I think, hold as I have felt who knew him not at all in the flesh, that though he stood apart, and walked with God, he was yet

completely, splendidly, radiantly human. Far from being discouraged by the contemplation in this hour of the nobleness of the man, let us never forget that any man may dare to rise unto the heights which he gained who, like Armstrong, walks with God and serves his fellow-men.

A few months ago I stood at the grave of the great Doge in honor of whom one of the two matchless columns in the Piazza of Venice was erected, the Doge Michael. On that tomb is written : "Here lies the terror of the Greeks. Whosoever thou art who comest to behold this tomb of his, bow thyself down before God because of him." Men and women, you and I are met this day to commemorate the life and the service of a great man. We think not chiefly, if at all, of the terror that he brought to the heart of his enemies, though he dared during war's bitterest hours all that did become a man. War's days are forever past and they that once were foes are now bound together in the bonds of indissoluble friendship.

May I not say, however, that all of us together of the North and the Southland, white man and Negro, Jew and Christian, as we come to behold the grave wherein his dust lies buried, bow ourselves down before God because of him and, having bowed ourselves, rise up again in spirit to a nobler stature such as was his because of

> " . . . . all that human and divine
> I' the weary, happy face of him—half god,
> Half man, which made the god part god the more."

We bow ourselves down because of him and reverently, gratefully, even lovingly, we ask God to make us worthy of the memory of Samuel Chapman Armstrong.